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Question1:

Question2:

Question3: Farm payments should be decoupled from production and based upon deriving environmental protection and stewardship benefits. This will decelerate the growth to larger farms. The use of good stewardship and conservation practices are more time consuming and labor intensive. The out migration of jobs from rural America has done more to hasten the increase in the upsizing of farms than farm programs. Mid sized farmers need jobs for either themselves and/or spouse to make enough money to live on ? part time farmers are becoming rare.

Question4: Farm payments should be decoupled from how the land is used, growing wheat, corn or soybeans, and coupled to environmental and stewardship practices used on the land. The use of an environmental super base acre should be instituted. Enrolled farmers would receive a minimum payment for each acre enrolled ? these acres would have to meet certain stewardship criteria such as not farming wetlands. Additional payments would be given per acre for the use of more aggressive stewardship practices such terracing fields or putting in filter strips along riparian areas.

This approach would yield three results. It would provide extra income farmers need to stay in business and thus protecting food security. Second it will be easier for small farmers to institute these more labor intensive practices thus slowing the upsizing of farms. Third, the public would gain better value from the investment they place into environmental programs. The runoff of sedimentation into our nation?s streams and water bodies is one of the last great environmental problems not being addressed. Pesticides, fertilizers, herbicides attached themselves to soil particles. When these soil particles are eroded from fields it is costing farmers and causing monumental problems down stream. The capacity of water supply lakes are becoming less due to sedimentation. Water quality is being compromised, and new regulations such as the Safe Drinking Water Act ?s Surface Water Treatment Rule enacted. This single rule is costly many small rural communities millions of dollars to comply ? simply disinfection by products are attaching themselves to soil particles in the water to create a carcinogenic agent. The Gulf of Mexico below the Mississippi Delta is a dead zone. Helping farmers preserve the soil is a winner for farmers and society.

Question5: Rural America?s future needs to focus on the up building of place. Place encompasses more than just the land. Place encompasses the wholeistic interaction of man to this asset. We want this asset to provide a safe and secure place to work, to play, to worship, to raise our children, and to build a future. It is not realistic that all of these things can occur in every very small hamlet, town, or village in Rural America.

Work becomes the one item that drives people away from rural area. If very small towns have good utilities that protect the health and safety of its citizens, these towns can become places where people can live, play, worship and raise their children.

In many rural area there are what are referred to anchor communities to which people drive to work or purchase staple items for their homes or rural businesses such as farms. U.S. rural development strategy must focus on strengthening these mid sized cities and shared economic corridors they have with nearby cities. Laws need to be passed that make it very unattractive for small locally grown companies to be overtaken by larger out of state companies. In many of these communities the plant that employed the majority of workers in the area have been closed due to a move of a plant to a more populated area or to overseas. Emphasis should be placed on creating cooperative business enterprises that are owned by local citizens. A Fannie Mae type of approach could be used to stimulate this kind of business enterprise. RUS cooperative business programs need to be expanded.

Small towns must have safe drinking water and wastewater treatment. No one will want to live in an unsafe and dirty environment. Only throwing money at small towns to help them build up their infrastructure is wasteful. This was tried by the EPA in the 1970's and was a long term failed approach. These communities need to be taught how to care for and maintain their systems so they will last for a long time and thus the public will garner maximum benefit from its investment. Many of the systems built by the EPA in the 1970s are failing because of poor management and upkeep. More funds need to be expended for technical assistance providers to teach and prepare leaders to do a better job of managing, operating, and maintaining their improved utilities.

Question6: The development of bio-based products should be a research priority of the U.S. The creation of a 'green/agro' silicon valley needs to be a high priority. This could be a cluster approach built around mid sized rural communities that have Land Grant Colleges.